

COMMENTARY

THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL

The Tortuous Path of Compromise

HAL LEHRMAN

ISRAEL has emerged from a month of agonizing maneuver almost as dramatic and conceivably as perilous as the month of her birth. In May 1948, the infant state fought for her life against five invading Arab armies—whose skill and spirit, as the test of battle was soon to reveal, had been grossly overrated. But in February of 1957, Israel stood at desperate odds with her truest friend and greatest benefactor, the United States of America—who possessed the incontestable power, if she chose to exert it, to transform benefactions into sanctions and sorely wound Israel, if not destroy her.

As this survey went to press, the two governments (with the United Nations in the wings) had reached agreement, at long last, and were drafting, word by word, the texts of declarations designed publicly to extricate them from the deadly impasse at which they had arrived over the dilemmas of the Gaza Strip and the Gulf of Aqaba. Pressures on both sides were intense: on the regime of David Ben Gurion, because President Eisenhower as a last re-

sort had thrown into the scales the weight of his unprecedented personal popularity and summoned the American people, in effect, to choose between Israel and himself; on the Eisenhower administration, because Congress and the country were unmistakably—even deafeningly—opposed to the immorality of invoking sanctions against Israel so long as more flagrant and greater transgressors of UN resolutions such as Egypt, India, and the Soviet Union went unchallenged. Negotiations had been further complicated by the need to “save face,” with each disputant committed to mutually exclusive positions which, on the surface, defied compromise.

Yet it already seemed clear that Israel, though obtaining considerably less than she first had required, was winning vastly more than the U. S. had first been willing to cede. In retrospect, it was now apparent, the American retreat had set in when, tentatively laying down the sanctions-loaded club waved over Israel's head in January to compel her “unconditional withdrawal” from territory still occupied after the Sinai “aggression,” the U. S. in early February had begun to explore with Israel the possible “conditions” for such withdrawal. This move at last took the Israeli-Egyptian dispute out of the UN. It was precisely what Israeli diplomacy had hoped would happen. As long as the dispute was locked up in the General Assembly, only the Arabs could benefit from the juridical confusions and technical moralities of the debate. Frank intervention

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by the U. S. was far more likely to achieve a realistic, viable settlement. By the month's end it was evident that:

—While Israel had not gotten specific legal "guarantees" prior to withdrawal, her stubborn insistence on assurances against renewed Egyptian belligerency had been vindicated.

—Standing doggedly on what she felt was right when nearly the entire world was prodding her to fall back, Israel had won the understanding of many UN members; obtained a solemn UN affirmation that—as Israel had tirelessly pleaded—her withdrawal and her security were part and parcel of the same Gaza-Aqaba problem; overtaken Egypt in the contest for public—as distinguished from governmental—opinion in the free world; given global publicity to her desire for peace in contrast to Egypt's belligerent posture, and inspired nearly universal admiration by simply refusing to yield to an Egyptian arrogance before which more powerful states had already bowed.

—As a result, a subtle but vital change in climate had occurred: the doctrinal fiction dominating previous U. S. and UN positions had faded; not Israel but Egypt was now tacitly being recognized as the major aggressor in the past, against whom safeguards would need to be taken in the future.

—Avoiding "guarantees" in the strict legalist sense, the U. S.—through declarations by the President, by the Secretary of State, and in and out of the Senate and House by leaders of *both* political parties—had nevertheless given assurances concerning Israel's security tantamount to solemn commitments, from which this nation could not recede tomorrow without prejudicing the value of its pledged word and the level of its world prestige and influence.

A GREAT blunder, it was now evident, had been committed last November when the United States—moving for once with decision, but in the wrong direction—had rushed to the rescue of Gamal Abdel Nasser. This is now the opinion of many American and other observers. Israeli action in Sinai—and even Anglo-French action in Suez, if given more time—would have cut the Egyptian dictator down to size or toppled him altogether. In one stroke, the Suez Canal would have been freed, Western

Europe liberated from its dependence for oil on Nasser's caprice, the Arab world relieved of a self-anointed leader whose ambition and appetite had grown too great even for his confederates, and the democratic world rid of Moscow's chief instrument—deliberate or unwitting—in the Middle East. Had John Foster Dulles not wrapped himself and the President—and Nikita Khrushchev—in the banner of the UN, behaving as if there were no Soviet threat in the Middle East but only an Anglo-French-Israeli one, there would have been no need two months later for an Eisenhower Doctrine proclaiming the opposite.

Though nearly everyone except Arabs and the Soviet bloc agreed that the unworkable pre-Sinai arrangements must not be reconstructed, the weight and majesty of the UN had thereafter been applied to the mere elimination of the results of "aggression" rather than to the prevention of further hostilities. The "conscience of the world" had seemed bent on restoring that original Israeli-Egyptian armistice whose abject failure had led to the Sinai conflict in the first place.

The U.S. was still solicitous to preserve the appearance that "crime does not pay." But the U.S. objective had now shifted from a paper armistice to effective non-belligerence—from the punishment of "crime" to elimination of its causes.

Under this heading, four major opportunities lay ready to be grasped: neutralization of the Sinai peninsula to prevent its becoming a Soviet base; reduction of the value of the Suez Canal as Nasser's weapon against Israel and the West; unrestricted maritime access to Elath; prevention of renewed *fedayeen* raids from Gaza.

The elimination of Sinai as a trouble spot seemed least in need of diplomatic ingenuity. Most close observers felt that the military logic inherent in the situation there would facilitate a solution. Nasser's attempt to stock Sinai with Soviet arms and "crack" Egyptian troops had ended in disaster, despite tolerably good communications. All the Egyptian military installations in the peninsula now lay demolished. Nasser would not be eager in the next months to commit any new Soviet weapons or reorganized troops—fresh or "veteran"—to what had become more of a trap for him than ever. The

emptiness in the north of the peninsula could serve, on the other hand, as a useful buffer. If anything, it was guessed, Nasser would welcome the extended residence there of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) as further insulation against the Israelis.

THE Suez problem, on the other hand, appeared as elusive as it was crucial. There was widespread agreement that Nasser must under no circumstances be permitted to remain in a position to control factory output, automobile traffic, and room temperatures in Glasgow, Antwerp, or Stockholm. Either a better jurisdiction of the Canal had to be devised, or else the world's dependence on it had to be reduced, or even perhaps entirely eliminated.

In a few weeks, the Canal would be sufficiently cleared to let smaller ships through. It was essential before then to extract some kind of working agreement from Cairo—a decision, at least, on whether Egypt or a UN administration, or the World Bank, or some other international agency should collect the tolls and determine the priority of ships seeking passage. Otherwise, what persuasion could work on Nasser that had not worked from July to October? Meanwhile Nasser was stalling on negotiations, and even stalling on the clearance work, obviously in order to exert pressure in the Aqaba-Gaza dispute. In effect, this violated the spirit of the "Six Principles" which were decreed by the UN last October as a basis for negotiations and which emphasized that Canal operation "shall be insulated from the politics of any country." Nasser, in fact, was now saying the Anglo-French invasion had nullified the "Six Principles" altogether.

At the turn of the year, French Foreign Minister Pineau had urged Mr. Dulles to seek action on Suez from UN Secretary General Hammarskjold, and Mr. Dulles had promised to do so. An Anglo-Franco-Norwegian-American plan, long in the making but delayed by hesitations in Washington, was finally submitted to Mr. Hammarskjold late in February for relay to Cairo. It gingerly proposed that, for the time being, tolls should be collected by an outside agency while Egypt continued to operate the Canal.

For any acceptable long-term solution a

firm tone toward Nasser by the UN Secretariat, reinforced by a firm tone toward both by Washington, was clearly called for. It was observed that Mr. Hammarskjold had a greater moral right, and Mr. Dulles was in a better tactical position, to prod Nasser. After all, the Canal had been *closed*, and the UN was *reopening* it. Surely this gave the UN some rights of supervision. Moreover, the U.S. was advancing the largest part of the preliminary clearance costs, which would require at least \$20 million. How could these funds be redeemed unless the Canal were fully and profitably used? Complete restoration, followed by a program of modernization such as was required to permit the Canal to handle larger ships—a program that might take as much as eight years—would need up to \$200 million. That kind of money could come only from American sources. Surely this gave the U.S. not only influence, but a stake, in securing an arrangement satisfactory to the Canal's users and designed to produce enough revenue for recovery of investment.

Nor could Nasser himself stay tough forever, with his assets frozen, the cities along the Canal dead, their bazaars deserted, the tourists gone, and income depleted. He desperately needed the Canal dues—and the user countries could withhold these until a settlement protecting all countries from willful Egyptian discrimination was reached. The discrimination once felt by Israel alone was now felt universally. It did not therefore seem unrealistic to suggest that a majority of the Canal's users, led or supported by the U.S., could work out a permanent solution (guaranteeing, among other things, equal treatment for Israel in a Canal restored by *world* effort), deliver it to Mr. Hammarskjold accompanied by vigorous instructions—or hand it to Nasser directly—and press for reasonable satisfaction.

From another point of view, however, might not the entire Canal problem have become less burning, in the long run, as a consequence of Nasser's interference? Indeed, had he perhaps not succeeded in killing the Suez goose that laid golden eggs?

Already a program of super-tankers was well under way. Eventually, the extra capacity of such ships would equalize the extra cost of the long route from the Persian Gulf to Europe around the Cape of Good Hope.

Oil companies were considering a "crash program"—if Nasser held out—for a pipeline debouching at the Turkish port of Alexandria on the Mediterranean and reaching back on the Turkish side of the Syrian border to the Kirkuk oilfields in Iraq, and perhaps beyond to the fields in Iran. And the Israelis were already laying a pipeline from Elath which was due to reach Beer-sheba in March, and the Mediterranean at Sukreir, near ancient Ascalon, a few weeks later. It was only an 8-inch pipe, and even when extended to the refinery at Haifa it would scarcely supply much more than Israel's own needs. But it blazed the trail for a bigger line and solved the technical difficulties which that would involve; the French were arranging the financing of a 16-inch pipe that would use the same route and the same pumping stations; and there was already talk of a 32-inch pipe. At the same time one heard of a drive to step up research in Western Europe in order to replace oil with atomic energy as the major source of power.

All this might or might not bring Nasser to reason. His own experts—some of whom had already visited the U.S. in search of capital—could be expected to impress upon him the gravity of his economic position. He might even try to bargain: promises of an era of sweetness and light at Suez in return for shelving the plans for new pipelines. But in any case, the Canal's old importance was dwindling.

OIL and commerce were the main reasons for Israel's refusal to get out of Aqaba. The Egyptian guns at Sharm el Sheikh, now spiked, had dominated the narrow Strait of Tiran which was the only passage for tankers carrying oil from the east and south to Israel's embryonic southern port at Elath, and for ships from Elath to Africa and Asia. If Elath became an alternative to Suez for Western Europe's oil, Israel would count immeasurably more in global economic and diplomatic calculations. Their stake in free passage through the Tiran Strait was simply too huge, the Israelis felt, to risk in exchange for a pat on the head by the UN or even by the President of the United States.

In a sense, Israelis privately conceded, there was no danger the Egyptians could ever again throttle Elath even if Israel did

obey the UN injunction to clear out unconditionally. After the licking the Egyptian garrison at the tip of Sinai had taken, and now that the Israelis had warships in the Gulf of Aqaba, Nasser would have difficulty finding new soldiers—and especially new officers—to station in isolated Sharm el Sheikh and on the islands guarding the Gulf's mouth. More important, he knew that the first shell fired at an Israeli ship in the Gulf would precipitate another Israeli attack—and another defeat for Egypt. Presumably, therefore, he would lie low. Still, Israel was reluctant to depend on Nasser's good sense for the security of her communications with half the globe. Nor did she want another conflict in an area where none would be able to prove who fired the first shot, with the result that she might once again be stigmatized as an "aggressor." Better to stand firm now, she reasoned, until the world itself ratified her right to passage through the Strait of Tiran.

"If Washington invited American Export or any other American line to put one ship on an Elath-East African run," an authoritative Israeli told this writer weeks ago, "we would be glad to quit Sharm el Sheikh the day it entered the Gulf. Nasser may be crazy with power—but not crazy enough to shoot at an American ship. Once you notify him that the freedom of Aqaba waters is an American interest, we can relax. When Nasser began blacklisting American ships going to Israel, the United States could have stopped him in his tracks by putting him on notice that such discrimination would not be tolerated."

The Aqaba problem, in the Israeli view, had always been one of confirming the Gulf's international character and Israel's right of "innocent passage" through it so indisputably that even Egypt would have to honor it. As long as Mr. Hammarskjöld kept reporting, with State Department approval, that this right was a juridical matter which some court some day would have to resolve, Israel was left in the status of a plaintiff sustaining continuous injury and looking high and low for a judge whose verdict, if favorable, would be scorned anyhow by the assailant. But now, at last, the U.S. seemed to be saying in effect that the Gulf was an international waterway free to all—which presumably meant that, if Egypt

objected, *she* would have to find a court to take her case to.

Final settlement at Aqaba involved withdrawal of Israeli forces in favor of UN forces and clear affirmation by the U.S., France, and other maritime powers that the Gulf and Straits must be opened to all comers. More important than the affirmations were the inferences: if the world henceforth regarded these waters as international, and Egypt flouted this opinion, then Israel would be entitled—in defense of her sovereign rights and even in conformity with the UN Charter—to take robust measures against the transgressor. In other words, Nasser would be left to face Israel quite alone. Of all conceivable restraints, this was sure to be the most persuasive for the Egyptian dictator, who already had ample evidence to assess his prospects of surviving another such encounter.

GAZA was a more difficult legal case for Israel to argue than Aqaba, and one on which she was likely to receive smaller assurances of security. At Aqaba there was only water and desert, a solid brief in international law, and no vexing Armistice lines. But the Gaza Strip had several hundred thousand Arabs, land of some value, and was an area supposed by the Armistice to be under Egyptian occupation. Retention of it by Israel would look suspiciously like that "Zionist expansionism" which Arab propaganda had been incessantly denouncing.

To Secretary General Hammarskjöld, Gaza was an open and shut legal case. Israeli military and civil administration must withdraw forthwith, as several UN resolutions had decreed, and the Egyptian presence reestablished after UNEF certification of Israel's departure. Admittedly, it would be desirable for UNEF to linger on in Gaza. But this would mean expanding UNEF's functions, revising the Armistice, and changing Gaza's civil status—all of which would require Egypt's consent. Would Nasser give it? Mr. Hammarskjöld was asking Israel to take the chance.

For a time the U.S. had acted evasively on the Gaza question, paying lip service to the view of many UN members that the old irritants to Egyptian-Israeli peace should not be restored, but endorsing the Ham-

marskjöld doctrine that Egypt had to agree to any and every change in the old arrangements. But by the end of February, the strategy was to seek a UN take-over on the basis of existing authorization instead and allow the natural needs of the area to facilitate the development of a *de facto* UN-Israeli collaboration which would leave the question of Egyptian "status" conveniently hanging in air. With some shrewd modifications, this appeared to be an outgrowth of ingenious State Department proposals which had been reportedly shaping up for some time, based on the following reasoning:

The fact that fedayeen might operate from Gaza was no excuse for Israel's holding the Strip by force. Fedayeen also operated from Jordan. Did that mean Israel was entitled to take Jordan? Or Syria? Israel could never hope to soften Arab hatred by grabbing pieces of Arab territory. That way lay endless enmity, the economic waste of perpetual military preparedness, and a garrison state. It did not matter that Gaza had never been sovereign Egyptian soil. Egypt's hold on Gaza was as solidly confirmed by the Armistice as Israel's on Jaffa or Nazareth, which had not been sovereign Israeli soil either in 1947 and had likewise been occupied in the course of the post-Partition war.

Nevertheless, Egyptian return to Gaza now would be perilous to peace, this reasoning conceded. At one time it might have been possible to keep her out of there entirely. For two years before Israel's attack, Nasser had been saying confidentially that he was prepared to write off Gaza in the event of trouble in Sinai. Now his lines of communication with Gaza had vanished. The Strip with its destitute population and its lack of economic resources had always been a burden to Cairo anyway. Nasser would hardly relish taking it up again. Besides, its Egyptian administrative system had been wholly wrecked.

But there was now the question of Oriental face and Arab "honor." Egypt's presence in Gaza would somehow have to be "restored." Why not in a little house somewhere in Gaza, it was suggested, with a green Egyptian flag bravely flying overhead, and a "governor" inside with plenty of gold braid and some such vital task as the registration of births? An outpouring

of news photographs in the Arab press would show the triumphal Egyptian "return." In the meantime a *de facto* UN trusteeship would have taken over from the Israelis and commenced the actual administration. Such an arrangement would also save the General Assembly's face and even Mr. Hammarskjöld's.

The latter had recommended UNEF's establishment on *both* sides of the Negev line at Auja to supervise compliance with the Armistice. By extension, UNEF could reinforce the UN's Truce Observer corps (UNTSO) around Gaza as well. A long-standing resolution empowered a UN agency (UNRWA) to look after the Gaza refugees. The director of this agency had already reported that, in view of the destruction of Sinai bridges, rails, and roads, he would have to supply Gaza through Israel for some time to come. The General Assembly might produce a new resolution authorizing Mr. Hammarskjöld to create a civil mission (UNRWA-UNEF), supervised by himself, which would "assist" in the replacement of the Israeli administration—and in fact run the territory. Simultaneously a military mission (UNEF-UNTSO) could be posted to the Gaza area to maintain the cease-fire and insure observance of the Armistice (exactly as prescribed in the original November 2 resolution establishing UNEF), thereby effectively policing the area against fedayeen activity. All this while the Egyptian "governor" would be vigorously stamping birth certificates in his headquarters with the green flag—and everybody would be happy.

EVERYBODY but the Israelis. Their ultimate agreement to any degree of UN power in Gaza represented a large concession. They remained acutely skeptical of the ability of any conglomerate international police force to keep the lid on a fedayeen underground in teeming Gaza.

Almost they preferred having the Egyptians back in Gaza; "Then, if fedayeen came over, we would have the Egyptians to hit back at." But how fight an international police for failing to do an impossible job? And the job, in the Israeli view, was decidedly impossible.

Allied occupation forces during World War II had found it desperately hard to re-

strain black markets and crime in European enemy countries where streets had names, and houses numbers, and the inhabitants could be more or less differentiated by the European eye. But UNEF, speaking a half-dozen languages, had some contingents, like the Yugoslavs, that were politically pro-Arab, and others who were emotionally involved, already sporting Nasser badges. Columbians or Danes were less biased, but how could they hope to keep effective check on a narrow strip of land peopled by 300,000 people? How would they even be able to tell Achmed from Mustafa and Mustafa from Mohammed, to say nothing of tracking down the agents of the Grand Mufti and the commanders of the murder squads with which Gaza soon would be infested? How, indeed, could such a monstrous security problem possibly be managed without complete administrative liaison between the Strip and the Israeli hinterland which would be the target of fedayeen operations? Proof already existed, the Israelis charged, that UNEF could only shield the fedayeen: Gaza under Israel's control was quiet, but murder gangs were already in operation again from UN-occupied El Arish in Sinai.

The natural connections of the Strip with the country bordering it on two sides gave the Israelis their chief argument for wanting to retain civil control even if, as they proposed, their soldiers departed. In private, they would admit that this program sounded bizarre, even presumptuous, on paper. But on the scene, they said, it happened to be the only workable plan, even for Gaza's Arabs. Here was a tiny, impoverished, and overcrowded patch of territory that nobody wanted—not Egypt, and not even Israel, except in order to avert the threat it contained to Israeli security.

Get away from the documents-and-resolutions world of the UN and look at geography and demography, one would be invited by Israeli interlocutors: you will find that all Gaza's roads lead to Israel, all its land joins Israel's. On the other side there is nothing but rock and desert. Egypt is far away; Israel begins just beyond the demarcation line. Egypt did nothing for Gaza's people except to recruit assassins from among them. For a half-century before Israel was born, the Gaza Arabs lived with

the "accursed Zionists"—and never with the Egyptians.

"Is the UN interested in Gaza as an abstract diplomatic question or as a problem of human beings?" the Israeli argument continued. "If we are compelled to withdraw our civil administrators, all the gains the Gaza inhabitants have made through us—even in such elementary matters as water, electricity, and sanitation—will be lost. Even Gaza's orange groves merge with ours. Economic cooperation between us is the key to the Strip's survival—and to the security problem it involves. And it would give the Arabs a positive reason for keeping the peace. That's why we ask to remain. We are even prepared to take back some of the 200,000 refugees and relieve the awful congestion in the Strip. Gaza is a Skid Row on our doorstep. It has to be made liveable for its people, for their sake and ours. We don't want any colonies. But neither can we ignore Gaza's fate and leave it to fester and provoke another war with Egypt. On the exact nature and form of Gaza's future regime we will cooperate to the maximum with UN investigators and custodians. But we cannot permit a belligerent Egypt to re-enter a territory to which she has forfeited whatever rights she may have had by violation of her Armistice contract. So far as we are concerned Egypt's rule in Gaza is finished. That chapter is closed."

IT WAS no exaggeration to say that such Israeli views on Gaza, as well as Israel's attitudes toward the Aqaba, Sinai, and Suez problems, met with considerable understanding and sympathy in official American circles. There was little disposition to deny that the measures advocated by the Israelis, if carried out in the right way, would improve security in the Middle East, thereby helping the U.S. as well as Israel.

Differences of opinion between Israelis and Americans had arisen, however, not over what was desirable but what was *possible* in the light of the other obligations the U. S. felt she had in the Middle East and in the world. The Eisenhower administration regarded the Israeli proposals as so many tempting but forbidden fruits to be plucked only at peril of justifying brutal aggression, outraging "the opinions of mankind," and alienating the Arab world.

In the past two months, disagreement had been so bitter that Israeli-American relations could hardly have been worse. Mr. Dulles spoke with rare brusqueness to pro-Israeli Americans who came to plead with him. He made certain observations to an Israeli cabinet minister which, coming from a member of one friendly government to a member of another, could only be described as extraordinary. He even found it possible to intimate to the American people that American sanctions might be leveled against Israel should she remain defiant of UN and U. S. demands.

Indeed, many friends of Israel felt the administration had already imposed partial economic sanctions following the Sinai invasion. But State Department circles pooh-poohed this charge. The ban against travel and economic aid, one was told, was being applied impartially to Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It had cost the American taxpayer an estimated \$3 million, plus wear and tear on the military establishment, to evacuate American nationals from the war zone. Until the danger of renewed hostilities had vanished, it would be irresponsible to permit the resumption of tourist travel. True, only six of the thirty-six members of the Four Point Mission staff who had been in Israel before October 29 were there now, but a similar cut had been made in the mission to Egypt.

As for direct economic aid, it was asserted, nothing promised Israel had been withheld. Shipments under the development and technical assistance programs scheduled for 1956-57—which envisaged a total of \$25 million in goods—had reached \$20 million as of January 31, over \$2 million of it shipped *after* Sinai. Nearly \$28 million in agricultural commodities for sale to Israel had been delivered. True, \$27 million in development grants and technical aid for the new fiscal year (1957-58) had been suspended—but this sum had merely represented a tentative program and had not yet been officially apportioned to Israel at the time of the Sinai attack. "You can't call it sanctions," one American official protested to me, "when you simply stop giving things away."

To those concerned for Israel's economic welfare, however, the impact and purpose of American behavior could not be dismissed so easily. To some, it looked like a clear at-

tempt to apply pressure. Travel prohibitions were inflicting hardship on numerous Israeli-American families and interfering with the American personnel of Israeli institutions. Valuable foreign exchange was being lost to Israel because of the virtual disappearance of tourists. (Jerusalem's spacious King David Hotel had gone out of business.) At American ports, where Israeli interests were involved, officials were now examining shipping documents, cargo limits, and other minutiae with unprecedented bureaucratic zeal. In Washington the Commerce Department, which had previously been handling export licenses for Israel routinely, was now "clearing" interminably with the State Department on materials vital to Israel's industry and civilian economy. Private American banks hitherto ready to offer or renew profitable loans which Israel had always serviced punctiliously were now holding back—obviously for reasons other than financial. (One such case involved an immediate \$20 million on which the Israeli Treasury had been counting.) An Export-Import Bank mission to investigate a projected fresh \$75 million loan had never left for Israel.

Nor, it was charged, had the U. S. taken equal "sanctions" against the Arabs. There had been no 1956 "Mutual Security" aid program at all for Egypt, hence far less to close down there. Because of the "decimation" of the U. S. technical mission in Israel, important projects were piling up without attention, and more than fifty million Israeli pounds in "counterpart" funds from transactions under various American programs were stagnating, though already anticipated by hard-pressed budgets. A new and sorely needed agricultural surplus program, involving up to \$70 million, was lying dormant. The 1957-58 grant-in-aid was, strictly speaking, not yet in arrears, but there had been legitimate expectations of an earlier start than usual for the coming fiscal year, and the delay was threatening all budgetary calculations. Far from being merely "tentative," the new "country program" had been approved by the International Cooperation Administration, it was claimed, and Israel so notified; an agreement negotiated between the U. S. mission and the Israeli government had actually been forwarded by the former to Washington for signature—which was still being withheld. The American

hold-back policy, it was bitterly asserted, was retarding the importation into Israel of necessities, not luxuries, and the gap would have to be filled by purchases elsewhere. "It isn't that the U. S. has just stopped 'giving things away,'" one was told, "not when we have been encouraged to make such 'things' a vital part of our economic planning. And especially not when the cut-off comes just as we get deluged by large-scale immigration and are making a massive humanitarian effort which in the past the U. S. has always helped but is now hindering."

IT WAS interesting, and instructive for future reference, to hear the grievances entertained against the Israelis in candid conversations in the vicinity of the State Department in and around early February.

One persistent complaint concerned the lack of Israeli "cooperativeness." In public utterances, I was told, the Israelis conveyed a zeal for compromise and peace—but in closeted diplomatic conference they presented demands rather than suggested solutions. They did not bring in proposals that might "get us off the hook." They seemed to think that it was up to somebody else to work out formulas; what they were asking appeared so eminently reasonable in their own eyes that any modification of it seemed unreasonable and malign.

The Israelis also assumed, it was said, that the U. S. must necessarily be partial to their case. They waxed indignant when we showed any interest in the Arabs. Some years back, they kicked up a furor when the U. S. decided to give arms to Iraq for purposes of regional defense, and Israel made a massive raid on Gaza to show us she was a stronger military power than Iraq. They lacked the detachment to see that the U. S. had to get along with the Arabs too. In the Gaza-Aqaba argument, their assumption that we ought to favor them was particularly shortsighted. If Washington became identified with either side, it would lose all influence—and all possibility of ever bringing about a just settlement.

The Department, it appeared, was especially incensed over the Israeli propaganda. (Around this time, violent explosions against Mr. Dulles were going off in the Senate.) The Israelis had put across the myth, it was asserted, that they were the injured

party, practicing an angelic patience for eight long years under the assaults of the Arabs. Actually, according to the American view, Ben Gurion's policy of massive retaliation had set off the cycle of bloody raids. More Arabs than Israelis had died in these exchanges. Sheer iteration of the contrary by the Israelis and their friends, Ambassador Eban's avowedly brilliant speech in the General Assembly right after the Sinai invasion, and a concentrated barrage of propaganda ever since had actually created the illusion that Israel was the injured party in Sinai. The plain fact of the matter (again according to the State Department) was that Israel was the deliberate aggressor. We know her frustrations with Egypt, and one might be able to excuse the attack, but we cannot justify it.

Departmental annoyance was expressed most sharply at the press uproar in support of Israel's demands for guarantees in Gaza and Aqaba. The heavy propaganda pressure made the American administration look bitter and grudging toward Israel—or compelled it to adjust its policy. ("We don't enjoy being unpopular," one informant admitted.) To the extent that the U. S. departed from her impartiality by seeming to bend to the Israeli-provoked storm in the newspapers, she lost bargaining power in her efforts to find a solution.

LIKE it or not, it had been said, one could not make any progress by insisting on pure abstract justice. One had to proceed from the practical possibilities of a concrete situation. Washington's long-range objective was to get Israel and her neighbors to agree on boundaries, obtain a settlement of all issues which the UN would ratify, and then stand firm against any future violator of that settlement. But the immediate need was to reestablish at least the *modus vivendi* of the original armistices, and to proceed from there. Premier Ben Gurion declared the armistice with Egypt void because Nasser had not respected it, but at the same time tried to deny belligerent rights to Egypt. The Israelis were not sincere; they kept offering to negotiate with the Arabs, but only for propaganda effect, since they well knew the Arabs would not negotiate. They scorned the value of a promise from Nasser, yet said they were willing to sign

a non-aggression pact with him and quit Gaza and Aqaba on the strength of it.

Worst of all, according to this indictment, the Israelis were working against their own interests by their refusal to evacuate conquered territory unconditionally. They professed to desire security—but they were insisting on a political victory first of all, one which they could not possibly obtain, and were thereby destroying all their chances for security.

The Egyptians, according to the American view, could not be pressured into any commitments before Israeli withdrawal. They were not unwilling to see UNEF's functions expanded. Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fawzi had indicated as much. (Two days after I was told this, Mr. Fawzi in the General Assembly announced that UNEF's only function was to watch the Israelis leave.) The Egyptians knew they would have to yield something—but it wouldn't be because the Israelis had forced them to! Many of the other Arabs and the Asians would look favorably on proposals to enlarge UNEF's role—after Israeli withdrawal. We are asking Israel for a pledge of faith that would be redeemed within perhaps not more than twenty-four hours: we are asking her to get out so that the General Assembly can then act immediately to prevent the attacks about which she complains. Naturally, the U. S. cannot *guarantee* anything. We can't tell the UN what to do. But we *know* that, unless Israel makes the first concession, she will never have security. In the eyes of the Arab-Asian world, to grant Israel a prior commitment on the political changes she desired, and then to enforce these guarantees with an expanded UNEF, would be allowing an aggressor to make conditions—it would be rewarding aggression. The foundations of the UN would be undermined if it abetted such cynicism—and the U. S. is dedicated to supporting and not undermining the UN.

Israelis and their advocates, whose numbers were increasing daily, had found the "moral" basis of these American arguments dubious in the extreme. It seemed a strange doctrine that required the UN to assent to illegal blockade and fedayeen action in order to demonstrate its morality. The case was eloquently stated in a *New York Times* editorial: "... if the UN should compel

Israel to withdraw without guarantees, it would . . . put itself in the ludicrous position of backing Egypt in rejecting peace and maintaining a state of war in defiance of its own character and resolutions."

Critics pointed out that the record of the U. S. herself in the UN debate over Sinai was disquieting in its inconsistency. Ambassador Lodge had announced one morning that General Assembly demands on Israel were only "hortatory and recommendatory"; that same afternoon—reportedly, after the Arab bloc had set King Saud to prodding his White House host, with the Dhahran air base as the poker—he announced that Israel's refusal to obey the General Assembly might have grave consequences. In the middle of January the U. S. expressed belief that Mr. Hammarskjold's mandate from the Assembly included the power to use UNEF for the achievement of a settlement in Gaza and the Gulf of Aqaba after Israeli withdrawal; late in January, the U. S. hailed a report by Mr. Hammarskjold that UNEF could be so used only if Egypt agreed beforehand. In early February, when a pair of vague resolutions on withdrawal and peace efforts were voted, Mr. Lodge led off by implying that they meant the UNEF might play a capital role in the solution of the disputes. Egypt's Fawzi then said UNEF was not in Egypt "to resolve any question or solve any problem," but exclusively to secure Israeli retreat; India's Krishna Menon said he agreed with Mr. Fawzi; winding up, Mr. Lodge vaguely agreed with Mr. Menon. Nor, it was recalled, had the U. S. done anything concrete during all these years of Egyptian indifference to UN injunctions which Washington was now proclaiming as mandatory. As late as mid-February, the President himself had publicly exposed his unawareness that such UN resolutions against Egypt even existed! Under such circumstances, were not Israel's hesitations understandable?

Why, it was asked, must Israel be the test by which the UN stands or falls? The UN had apparently survived greater affronts. Egypt herself had flouted UN resolutions; the Security Council had *ordered* a plebiscite in Kashmir, yet India had disdained to comply. The Soviets had shot up Budapest, before and after UN resolutions, yet the delegates had continued sitting with

the Soviet representatives on 42nd Street. Could it be that Israel was important just because she was small and weak: because if the UN could not beat *her* down, then the UN was indeed finished?

To many, it seemed that the U. S. was making a serious error in laying the emphasis she did on Arab-Asian good will and on the UN as the basis of American policy. "Anti-colonialism" had become such a fetish, it was said, that nobody dared raise his voice any more to suggest that any former colonial territory was not *ipso facto* always in the right. If the U. S. depended on the UN as the effective channel for action in a tormented world, she would have to do the bidding of the Asians who held the balance of whatever "power" the UN possessed.

Actually, critics of the American argument continued, it approached perilously close to humbug to contend that the UN *must* be arbiter and judge. The UN had never settled, it could not settle, any dispute which a big power did not want it to settle. Even constitutionally, the only real authority possessed by the UN rested in the Security Council—which was dominated by the big powers. With the Council impotent because of the veto, an effort had lately been made to build up the General Assembly—which at best had only the right to recommend, not to order. But a fresh deadlock had developed, this time in the bowels of the Assembly itself, because of the Asia-African-Soviet working alliance and its ability to avert any two-thirds majority. It now seemed as though Washington was seeking to develop the Secretary Generalship as the seat of UN authority. At any rate, the U. S. had repeatedly indicated the great respect she entertained for Mr. Hammarskjold, his opinions, recommendations, and decisions—almost implying at times that these by themselves possessed the force of law.

THE fact of the matter, however, was that the Secretary General had no such authority. His job was really to be a manager only—from cafeteria to Security Council. When his eighty employers agreed, there were clear instructions for him to act on. When they did not agree, he was without instructions. He could not make policies of his own. The sole constitutional initiative he enjoyed under the Charter was to call

the UN's attention to what he considered dangerous situations.

According to many critics, however, the present Secretary General arbitrarily arrogated power to himself by the way he "interpreted" the instructions to himself in various resolutions. In a sense, defenders of Mr. Hammarskjold could argue, he continued perforce even here only to reflect the will of the great powers—specifically, of the U. S. and the USSR. For whatever he did, he dare not offend either one. (Trygve Lie, Hammarskjold's predecessor, saw his job begin to slip away when he stopped pleasing Moscow.) If so, one might conclude that Washington *approved* of the way he interpreted his instructions. But even this was vastly different from *hiding* behind his interpretations, which was what Washington actually seemed to be doing, and treating them as if they were the sacred commandments of the "conscience of the world" against which Washington dare not remonstrate.

The need to get a two-thirds majority had led to Mr. Hammarskjold's having great leeway in the General Assembly, as that body had recently developed. At each major turn, his critics alleged, he had steered things in the Arab direction. This writer recalls how, after the Assembly voted to create UNEF last November, conjecture in UN corridors focused on the amount of authority the Secretary General would "interpret" the Emergency Force to have. Would he emphasize its mandate to enforce the cease-fire and help settlement of the Suez and Arab-Israeli conflicts, or would he limit UNEF to standing by while the invaders departed? In either case, according to the predictions, it would be hard to find a *two-thirds* majority to overrule him. Mr. Hammarskjold chose to interpret the UNEF's mandate in the narrowest possible sense, and even gave Nasser the right to compel UNEF's departure at his pleasure.

APOLOGISTS for the Secretary General claimed he was under constant pressure from the Arab-Asian bloc, with no counter-pressure from the U. S. to help him resist it. Perhaps so, his critics would concede—but the partiality he showed Nasser was so extreme, it was charged, that much more than Arab-Asian pressure was needed to ac-

count for it. The UN's moral force had been good enough reason, in his eyes, to require the Israelis (and the British and French) to withdraw—but not good enough reason to impose peace arrangements on Nasser, with or without his consent, after the Israeli withdrawal. Nasser's agreement, he was insisting, must be secured, otherwise the UN would be abusing sovereign rights of a member state. According to undenied report, Nasser had never even agreed to let UNEF in at all; there was said to be no document granting Egyptian consent to this in the UN archives; it appeared the Secretary General had invented the need for Nasser's prior consent, then had proceeded as if he had it, had spread the notion he did have it by reiterating his praise for Cairo's cooperation—and was now again arbitrarily insisting that Nasser would have to consent to the next step too.

Did these antics, sympathizers with Israel inquired, spring from zeal for the Arabs or dislike for the Israelis? Whatever its origin, they charged, a bias clearly existed. It showed itself as long ago as Mr. Hammarskjold's first official visit to the Middle East to mediate an earlier Israeli-Egyptian conflict. He stopped first in Cairo, then sent a message to Prime Minister Ben Gurion. (He could have dispatched it through his own UN establishment, which had representatives in Israel, but he chose to send it through the American embassy, as if to intimidate the Israelis.) He notified Ben Gurion that, after talking to Nasser (and before talking with them), he was convinced that war and peace in the Middle East depended entirely on the Israelis!

Subsequently, Mr. Hammarskjold was not above lobbying against Israel's interests among other member states, it was charged. He actually permitted himself to scold Foreign Minister Pineau when France alone voted with Israel against an anti-Israeli resolution in the General Assembly. He made himself extremely difficult for the Israeli Foreign Minister to find for consultation, but he was not averse to being photographed with the newly arrived delegate of the blood-spattered Hungarian puppet regime. His official reports—written in a masterfully involved language which was becoming known as Dagwidge or Hammartalk—invariably showed coolness toward Israel but a touch-

ing regard for Egyptian susceptibilities. At least three months ago Israel had begun requesting him to ask Cairo whether Nasser still felt he was at war with Israel, and whether he intended to renew his blockade and fedayeen operations. Only a day or so ago Israel was still beseeching him to find out if Nasser would claim belligerent rights if Israel should quit Aqaba and Gaza. At no time, however, was Mr. Hammarskjold known to have relayed the question.

On the other hand, it was widely asserted, he had reneged frequently on his own declarations to the Israelis. He had implored them, when he had his hands full in Sinai, not to talk about Gaza—and not to leave it! He had once conceded to the Israelis that the Gulf of Aqaba was an international waterway; now he was arguing that it was a disputable legal question! In December he had favored giving UNEF power to prevent hostilities in the Gulf and the duty of remaining there till the issue was settled; now he was demanding, rather irrelevantly, that Israel must first agree to letting UNEF enter Israeli territory in the Negev!

IN VIEW of all this, few objective observers could blame Israel for not hearkening to U.S. entreaties and trusting to Mr. Hammarskjold's good offices. The Israelis contended further, in view of the Secretary General's nostalgia for the old Armistice, that an armistice ceased to exist when it was persistently dishonored—but that its expiration did not automatically mean a state of war. Nor, even, did an armistice permit belligerent rights, as the Egyptians argued. The Israeli-Egyptian Armistice specifically banned hostilities, and the UN Charter itself ruled out belligerency. Nor was Israel's willingness to accept a non-aggression pact with Egypt inconsistent with Israel's lack of confidence in Egyptian pledges, as the Americans argued. Such a pact would signify an important reversal on Nasser's part. Israel would expect the pledge to be spelled out by Egypt before the UN, which could take note of it in a resolution and thus put it solemnly into the record. Then, if the Egyptians violated their promise again, they could be resisted with the backing of the world organization.

The Israelis, moreover, vehemently denied the American assertion that they were

jeopardizing their security for the sake of a political triumph. They were not interested in triumphs, the Israelis said, but *only* in security. But they could not jeopardize their very survival when neither the UN nor the U. S. was willing to take any responsibility for Nasser's good behavior. The proof of this, they privately told all who would listen, was that Israel would be satisfied if the U. S. alone publicly guaranteed Aqaba and Gaza. "We would even get out," I was authoritatively informed, "if President Eisenhower—*without* any public declaration—simply told Ben Gurion he did not know how it would be done, but the U. S. would definitely see to it that Israel got the protections she needs. Such a private assurance would be enough for us."

"It's easy to take risks on the thirty-eighth floor of the UN," one was told. (The Secretary General has his offices on that floor.) "We took risks enough on October 29; we risked the lives of thousands of our boys, and exposed our towns and settlements to the danger of attack by Nasser's jet bombers. We do not propose to do that again. It is impossible to produce tranquility by restoring the *status quo ante* in Gaza. Egypt's return there will bring more fedayeen than ever. Nasser can hold 'victory' parades in Cairo—but not in Gaza. The population there saw his defeat with their own eyes. His only possible answer is bigger and better fedayeen operations."

In that event, the Israeli attitude made clear, war would erupt again. The State Department was being implored not to be misled by the past eight years of relative Israeli passivity. "Henceforth a fedayeen assault will be regarded as no less an act of war than a brigade attack." The same would be true in Aqaba. "Never again will an Israeli ship turn back out of Elath," Foreign Minister Golda Meir had notified Mr. Hammarskjold.

This was the mood, not only of the Israeli government and its UN delegation, but of the entire Israeli people. The nation, all evidence indicated, was solidly united. Israel was ready, not only for another Arab war if no other way could assure her survival, but also for something perhaps even graver—sanctions. Instead of anxiety over this possibility, there was quiet readiness. Letters from ordinary Israelis to friends and relatives

here spoke casually—not with resignation or bitterness, but as a matter of course—of the coming food scarcity. Indeed, there seemed almost an eagerness for sanctions—as if the country were looking forward to the test.

Friend and foe in the UN now knew the extent of Israeli determination; Mr. Hammarskjöld knew it; Mr. Dulles knew it. This knowledge had made vastly more difficult the task of those who might still have sought to persuade Israel to yield and, failing that, would urge or permit her condemnation.

Israel's staunch conduct also increased the admiration of sympathetic governments. Certain UN delegates, after voting on instructions from their capitals in favor of another summons to Israel to withdraw, would privately congratulate the Israelis and exhort them *not* to. The British and French seemed almost envious in their appreciation, ruefully meditating on their own over-hasty retreat. The mounting number of those who felt Nasser had gotten away with murder in the UN enjoyed seeing both Nasser and the UN being challenged at last—and by a small nation against whom the cry of "colonialism" could not be raised.

ISRAEL'S stand only intensified the nationwide support for her in the U. S. She had scored first by her prowess in Sinai. Her exposure of Nasser's hollow boasts and threats had not gone unnoticed. (The greatest single triumph of Israel public relations—whose performance is normally less than brilliant—had been the widely publicized exchange of 5,000 Egyptian prisoners for a total of *four* Israelis.) Her spokesmen's firm explanation of her case on Gaza and Aqaba day after day before the bar of world opinion, even as she was executing her stage-by-stage withdrawal from Sinai in obedience to UN injunctions, had made the reasonableness and justice of her position clear. And now American public opinion was reacting with warm sympathy to her refusal to surrender.

Inevitably, this national groundswell of sentiment washed into the Capitol. The outcry in Senate and House could not be belittled as merely partisan catering to a popular cause. The Israeli crisis formed part of, and gave impetus to, a general revolt against our recent policy in the Middle East—a re-

volt touched off by the administration's own sudden discovery of the seriousness of a Soviet threat which only a short while before it had denied. Motivations were varied, but the wrath of a Fulbright, a Mansfield, a Morse could not be shrugged away as vote-seeking. The feeling grew in Congress that national interests were being jeopardized—and that even some principles of morality had been violated, or at least abused, by an administration that never ceased to trumpet the righteousness of its foreign policy.

Not since the 1948 life-and-death struggle with the Arabs had Israel stood in higher public esteem in this country. Symptomatic of this was the protest that went up from the heart and center of Republican power, from none other than Senate Minority Leader Knowland and his closest party colleagues, at the first public hint of possible sanctions against her. Newspapers of every persuasion joined in, and a right-wing commentator like Fulton Lewis, Jr., devoted two broadcasts to flaying Dulles for the "obscenity" of dreaming of sanctions against Israel and not against the butchers of Budapest. The Secretary of State's about-face effort to placate Israel followed soon after, to be followed in turn by Mr. Hammarskjöld's abrupt realization that sanctions might introduce "new elements of conflict" into an already highly explosive situation. Until the very end, it had remained conceivable that everybody would simply back away from the crisis without settling anything. This had happened at the UN before, even in connection with sonorous resolutions on other Arab-Israeli deadlocks. Time, until the other day, had ratified Egypt's unilateral discrimination against Israel at Suez; time still ratified Israel's possession of one half of Jerusalem.

On the other hand, right up to the last moment before the U.S.-Israeli agreement, one could not entirely discount the threat of sanctions. The psychological pitfalls in the struggle for public favor were deep. If Israel had given the impression of holding out too obdurately against an offer which the President was able to represent to American and world opinion as eminently reasonable, then she could conceivably have lost enough support to make administration backing of UN sanctions publicly possible.

Mr. Dulles still enjoyed a large measure

of immunity from public opinion. Unlimited confidence was still apparently accorded him by a President who himself still felt the sense of historic mission inspired by a landslide personal triumph at the polls. Loud clamor in press, pulpit, party, and Congress could not yet penetrate the armor of such self-confidence. The Secretary of State also had the protection of his own stern conscience, and of a firm faith that its dictates were inspired by a power greater than men. Finally, he did not always consult his own advisers. (If he had talked with Department professionals whose opinions are available to many reporters, he would have learned that, in their informed view at least, sanctions against Israel alone were "unthinkable" because of their essential immorality, and sanctions against both Israel and Egypt for contempt of the UN were "impractical," if only because the Soviets would be delighted at the chance to render them null and void in Nasser's case.)

As for Premier Ben Gurion, the parliamentary situation inside Israel gave him considerably less immunity from a public opinion passionately distrustful of anything short of invulnerable guarantees. Because he was now apparently climbing down from an all-out resistance stand which mainly he himself had brought his people to adopt, the Israeli leader would need all of his customary individual daring and all of his own high prestige to carry cabinet, parliament, and the nation with him.

IN THE long view, there were signs that, once the dust of the current diplomatic struggle had cleared, relations between the U. S. and Israel would greatly improve. The administration had, after all, moved a considerable distance away from its "surrender-or-else" attitude toward Israel. Another sign was its abandonment of naive anti-colonialism on the Algerian issue; it decisively foiled UN action in that conflict, which would have produced only mischief—here the administration was not afraid to risk the displeasure of the Arab-Asian bloc. A third sign

was the evidence, still invisible on the surface but accumulating below, that the Department of State was at last, finally and completely, disenchanted with Israel's arch foe, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The U. S. was not necessarily thirsting for his downfall; perhaps worse might succeed him. But henceforth at least, it seemed, the Department of State would rest no confidence in him—and grant him no concessions of any kind except in return for the hardest of guarantees. The visit of King Saud, and the President's drive for a "baksheesh fund" of \$200 million with which to lubricate certain wheels, were not events that advocates of an enlightened American policy could hail with unmixed satisfaction. But they were at least part of a program to isolate Nasser, make him more tractable, and introduce some realism into Washington's efforts to come to grips with the realities of the "mysterious" Orient.

Friends of Israel knew—as did Israel's leaders—that the U. S. must in all her Middle Eastern policies take due account of African and Asian sentiment. As long as Arab-Israeli peace was not achieved, therefore, this nation was bound to have a "split personality." Her policy in the area would necessarily seem to swing now toward one camp, now toward the other. Whatever the name of the Secretary of State at any moment, or indeed whatever the political complexion of the administration, the national policy could not be one-sided: it would have to seek the friendship of both sides.

This, all except the most rabid partisans of Israel understood. One could, however, legitimately hope for less straddling of issues, for less concern to seem agreeable at all times to all men, and for an occasional positive affirmation by this country of her views and intentions, even if that meant the risk of affronting those enemies of Israel whom the U. S. felt she must make her friends. It was even likely that such vigor would make a more salutary impression on Arab peoples and potentates than a timorous policy of conciliation at high prices.